

1-1963

JANUARY 1963

# avant guardian

SAN FRANCISCO ART INSTITUTE STUDENT MAGAZINE

Yomfin

mouse traps

painting figures on a wall  
of black

and suicide trumpets  
blue foxes.

'60

Agusta Alexander



"THE WHALE" LITHO BY ROD TITUS. 7" x 9 1/2"

i was in thebes  
that time when they forgot to  
bury ANTIGONE's brother

he had run out  
and she ran out

and i ran out  
when she ran out  
to help her die  
or see her die  
or die  
too

but she didn't die  
almost  
because i see her now and then  
in the streets  
walking  
slowly  
sadly  
with her father  
who isn't  
and her brother  
who had not to be  
and without her brother who was  
and not with her uncle  
who wasn't ever after that

and even  
with me  
sometimes

and she didn't die  
almost  
because she loved so much  
and because she was love so much  
that nobody  
not even god  
could kill it

and poor ANTIGONE  
will live  
forever

and even  
with me  
sometimes  
because i am she  
sometimes

Agusta Alexander

i sat on a wall once and watched the sea  
come in and  
go

and a boy  
sat beside me

said nothing much  
nothing worth  
mentioning except  
that about the saint  
francis

gone he said

came in and  
went

and then he went  
that small boy

so i watched the waves  
come in and  
go

and the sun  
go

Agusta Alexander

Miss Wright dismissed the fourth grade early so that we fifth-graders could get in an hour's undisturbed work on the wreaths. There were to be fourteen of them, one for each of us to place upon Harvey Alban's bier.

"You make the lilies like this," Miss Wright said, holding up a piece of stiff white art-paper which she had cut into a shape resembling the upper part of a church window. "Then you role it, very carefully, so as not to crease it." She rolled the paper, holding it high, and making it very narrow at the bottom. "And then you pin it together and insert the stamens in the middle. See?"

I closed my eyes and tried to think of Harvey Alban, lying still and cold-----where? Where was he now? I leaned across the aisle and said to Margot, "What do they do with---you know---Before the funeral?"

She turned her round and rosy wholesome face away from me, and did not answer for a short moment. "I think he lies in state in the funeral parlor," she said. Her eyes dreamed. "I think they paint his face and put him in a casket lined with red velvet, and heap flowers on his chest. They have this little stage at one end of the room, and they put the casket on that, and baskets of flowers all around, and soft lights, and everybody tiptoes in and looks and weeps."

I clicked my tongue in the scorn I customarily used at the mention of Harvey Alban.

"Who'd cry?" I said, nudging Margot.

She stopped cutting, her fragile hands frozen like a butterfly over a leaf. She turned her face toward me and said, "Your speaking of the Dead."

Shocked, I returned to my paste-crusted lily, which I had already creased.

Harvey Alban was the embodiment of wickedness. In our tiny, rough town where the qualities of virtue and serenity were lean indeed, Harvey was an outlaw: the neighborhood's "Bad Boy". At twelve, he seemed never to have been innocent.

My mother turned in from the front door one evening after Harvey had chased me home, her face white. "The things that

that child called me", she whispered to my father. Harvey called people names as he chased them, odd names, exotic names, surely wicked names.

My father, who did not know the boy, said, "In a town like this you've got to expect tough kids. With loggers and fishermen, you don't get dancing-school types, you know." My father turned to me. "He's a bully. All bullies are cowards. The only way to make Harvey stop teasing you is to stand up to him."

I said, "Okay." It was one of those things you just don't bother to explain to parents.

Harvey had an enormous head set upon a thin, bandy-legged body; there couldn't have been much strength in his wandlike arms. His face was like a full moon rising above a scrubby pine tree. His skin was milky white, his mouth full, but colorless. He had no eyelashes or eyebrows. He resembled one of us when we pull one of our mother's nylon stockings over our faces for Halloween. The smoothness and the blankness of his face would on another person have seemed babyish. On Harvey, it was a horrible mask.

He smelled; he was dirty; he wore his sneakers without socks and laces. Rumors were heard here and there, occasionally, that he wore no underwear. All this, in a sockless and laceless society, might have passed by eyes unseen. But in Harvey it only confirmed the inner evil.

In our town, young boys flung dirt clods with the same fine techniques as baseballs elsewhere. Broken store windows and filched cigarettes were all a part of boyish normality. But Harvey rejected these pastimes as philanthropic. His mischief existed solely in the terror he struck in the imagination of all who looked upon his face. He chased all who would run. Not to run was unthinkable.

"I consider him an unusual challenge," Miss Wright said, at a Sunday dinner. "I feel that I would be off to a wonderful beginning if I could reach that child."

Miss Wright was just out of normal school and took her teaching career with missionary zeal. She rented a small apartment attached to our big, rambling house, and boarded at our table. My mother, whenever did come to feel

herself at home in that town, took Miss Wright under her protection and showed her a great deal of sympathy, although Miss Wright kept protesting and saying that teaching in a three-room school was a "wonderful adventure", and "great fun". "I should think you would have your hands full enough," mother said. "I should think it would take all your strength, teaching two grades in one room with all those tough wild children."

Miss Wright looked significantly at me and said, "Anyway they're not all tough and wild."

After dinner I wandered out of the house, and away from grown-up talk, out into the beautiful autumn afternoon, up the wooded hill behind our house. I stopped by the edge of Crabtree's meadow to pick the last of the juicy, sweet blackberries that clung among the bushes. Last year, when I was still a tomboy, I had built a shack of orange crates deep in the prickly thickets; there I had spent much of the summer in a lonely state, brooding about Ruth Heaton, my best friend who had moved away.

After gorging myself with blackberries, I decided to take a walk up to the old shack on top of the hill. Halfway up to the shack, Harvey Alban came silently from the hemlock stand, to meet me. His tall, lean body cast a grotesque shadow in front of me. I stopped in dead silence, and my heart began to beat horribly fast. Onward he plowed, scuffing his laceless shoes, grinning. "Well, well," he said. "Hello, Rapunda." I ran like a rabbit, across the meadow, past the blackberry bushes, and down the hill. Down, down the hill. "Rapunda, Rapunda," I could hear trailing behind me. "Rapunda, Rapunda, Rapunda," he called again, and laughed, the evil, blood-curdling laugh of Harvey Alban. And then there was silence behind me and I knew that he had gone.

I stopped running and held my hand over my heaving heart. The blood drained from my face as I said to myself, "What if he had caught me?" Nobody, as far as I knew, had ever been caught by Harvey.

Why did he call me Rapunda? He had never called me that before. It sort of reminded me of a character in a children's story that I was familiar with -----Rapunsel, Rapunsel, let down your golden hair.

savage anymore. "Hi, Rapunda," he said, as he balanced his weight on one skinny leg. I gasped. What was the terrible meaning of the name?"

"Why don't you ask her for a date?" yelled one of the boys. The rest took it up ----- "Yeah, why don't you ask her to the movies?" "Go on, ask her."

I closed my eyes, and tried to hold back the emotion. I couldn't let the kids know I was enjoying myself.

From the steps of the school, Miss Wright called, "People, people, what are you doing there?" She started towards us. "Boys, you just get back on your own side of the playground this instant."

Harvey opened his mouth and said, "Rapunda, will you go to the movies with me this Saturday?"

Shocked into a state of sudden relaxation, we all let out our breaths in a community gasp.

"Boys, boys," Miss Wright called, approaching, picking her way through the puddles.

I stared at Harvey and at his crusted garments, his raveled sneakers, and I started to giggle. Wildly, everyone joined in; the boys whooped, and the girls giggled.

Miss Wright pushed her way through the crowd. "Boys, boys, get back to your proper place in the yard. What ever possessed all of you. Imagine. What are you all laughing at?"

I lifted my face, feeling quite guilty. I looked at Harvey standing in front of me, I saw the same face, the same expression, but the power and evil was gone.

Miss Wright pounced. She took Harvey by the arm, and glared about fiercely. "Shame, oh shame on you," she cried, "All of you." And she gave me a glare that I had never seen her use before.

Harvey Alban was not going to be redeemed. He pulled away, fled the schoolyard, and never returned.

Vacation came, and five days after Christmas my father's friend found Harvey's body in the river below our house. His body was wedged between the pilings.

He had been missing three days before his mother got around to reporting it.

I went inside the house and told my parents of my harrowing experience. My father said, "If you hadn't run, he wouldn't have shamed you." Miss Wright said, "Harvey is a desperately unhappy child, and I'm certainly going to make it my business to reach him, somehow."

She had lost patience with him once, when he kept sniffing very loudly, all through the fourth-grade arithmetic lesson. We fifth-graders were supposed to be studying, but we just sat there staring at the same paragraphs, listening for the next sniff. There was a tremendous variety in Harvey's sniffing. He would start off with a kind of glissando deep in his throat, building it up to a snore. Sometimes the snore was prolonged; sometimes he ended it abruptly in a rapid series of puffs through his nose.

"Do you have a cold, Harvey?" Miss Wright asked in a very reasonable tone.

"Cold?" Harvey said, from his seat in the back of the room. It would have been better for Miss Wright if he could have been placed toward the front of the room, but the desks at the back of the room. It would have been better for Miss Wright if he could have been placed toward the front of the room, but the desks at the back of the room were the largest. After all, Harvey was twelve years old.

"Cold," Miss Wright repeated with an angered tone of voice. "If so, Harvey, I suggest you step outside and blow your nose." Harvey arose in a leisurely way, stepped outside into the fire escape and closed the door. We heard him blow his nose loudly and scornfully. We waited, but he did not come back. Once more Harvey had escaped.

He usually managed to escape during recess, or at lunch hour. At the times he had been excused to go to the bathroom, this was very difficult on Miss Wright. She tried to ignore the wild waving hand, turning him down three out of four times, but he would just sit in the back of the room, snapping his wrist up in the air, until she finally nodded at him. He never came back from these trips.

They didn't have a truant officer in town, but the Superintendent of Schools would go out after him. The Superintendent usually found him down by the river, at the oyster beds.

So we sat after school and made wreaths for Harvey, ashamed because we had not been nicer to him, taking special pains to construct our paper flowers carefully. The whole class was to go to the funeral, bearing our tribute.

When we had finished making our wreaths, we went to the front of the class and laid the wreaths, tagged with our names, on Miss Wright's desk. As one of the boys in the class passed my desk, he said, "Hi there, Rapunda."

I don't know what got into me, but I burst into tears. The whole class watched me; Miss Wright watched me.

"Don't call me that, don't call me that name," I cried. Miss Wright abruptly left her desk and came towards me.

"You little ghoul," she yelled. "You dedeifull little hypocrite, pretending to cry; pretending to feel something you never felt." "All of a sudden you want to be identified with Harvey, because he has the attention now; because he is dead."

She released me, and I ran from the room.

We put our wreaths on Harvey's bier, and we were scared, for it was our first funeral. We were both disappointed and relieved that the coffin was closed, and we didn't have to see Harvey again.

And I didn't cry. Miss Wright finished out the school year, but moved away from my parents' boarding house. Parents usually end up siding with their children. My mother's attitude changed towards Miss Wright, after the little episode in the classroom.

And I didn't cry.

Patricia Pender

"There now, you see?" Miss Wright would say in a sorrowful tone of voice to my mother. The boy's undernourished, for one thing. Imagine, eating raw oysters down at that filthy river."

I shivered, seeing the malign vision of Harvey, hunched over in the mud flats prying at a chalky shell of an oyster, taking out the quivering semi-transparent lump, popping it into the full colorless mouth of his.

Miss Wright would continue, "It's just plain criminal that the authorities can't do something about it."

"What authorities?" my mother would snap. This only proved to her the excruciating inadequacies of the town. "The Welfare people haven't even got the time to handle all the dole cases."

One night at the dinner table my parents and Miss Wright were discussing Harvey Alban, as usual. "Who are this Albans boy's parents, anyway?" my mother asked.

Miss Wright's lip trembled. "No father," she said mournfully. Mother looked at me with a look that said, Run outside and play. "At least, none in evidence," Miss Wright continued. "And his mother works as a shucker at the oyster factory. I understand that she is not better than she should be, either."

"Go outside and play," my mother demanded. I went out and sat on the front steps for a while.

When I went back into the house my mother had her arm around Miss Wright's shoulders. Miss Wright's eyes were red from crying and she was saying, "But I simply have to save that poor, awful child. This is a challenge, a test to see if I'm worthy of a teaching career." She lifted her head and her watery eyes were swollen. "He's only a lonely misunderstood child."

It was true that loneliness was Harvey's main problem; but he seemed to move through it easily. But a child? Uneasily I looked at myself in the dining-room mirror as I went through. I was a child; Harvey was not ----no he had never been a child.

Just before school was to be let out for the Christmas vacation, Margot and I started making plans to construct a creche as a surprise for the Sunday

School. The little ones would enjoy it, we thought; such a kind, lovely thing to do. We discussed it at recess, huddled together by the woodshed on the girls side of the schoolyard. We would make a shawl to cover my bride-doll's head for the Madonna. The Christ Child would be Margot's smallest baby doll.

"We'll wrap it in swaddling clothes," Margot said. "We should have purest linen."

"I don't know about the purest linen," I said doubtfully. "How about a nice clean dish towel?"

"For the Christ Child?" she said, looking at me sadly. I should have realized that Margot felt these things so much more, her father being a minister, and all.

"Well, I guess you're right." Margot was satisfied, and decided to go to the other end of the school yard. I stayed, and sat down on the bench to eat my lunch. Margot came running back, shouting. "Say, do you know what the boys are saying?" she yelled. "They're saying that Harvey Alban loves you."

I was horrified. We looked across to the boy's side. The boys were clustered in a large ring, moving across the windy school yard towards us. The ring surged and parted and closed again; we had a glimpse of Harvey's white moon face within. The boys pushed towards us, bearing the unspeakable nucleus.

I straightened and set my back against the woodshed wall, and waited like a princess. Margot and the rest of the girls huddled to the side, pressing their high-pitched shrieks back into their mouths with their mittened hands. I stood tall and rigid, choked with pride; it was good to get all this attention, even if Harvey was the cause of it.

Onward bore the boys through the rain puddles, shouting with their bully voices. "Here she is, Harvey," they shouted. "Here's your girl." "Why don't you kiss her, huh, why don't you hug her?"

The ring pushed and parted disgorging Harvey. I had placed my hands against the wall, palms pressing back, with my chin up and with steady, brave eyes.

The shouts died away in the cold wind. Harvey didn't look

Agusta Alexander

1-1963

I was mad:  
Can you imagine  
Those grey flannel plenty o' room sex symbols  
Passing faster

Damn you.  
I feel better not sharing,  
This is mine.  
Metallic, maroon  
Shining pride  
This is I.

No ride.

Greenish dust rasped  
Stopped  
And moving on  
Amid word turns  
Of this and that

Art nor law did we exchange.  
Crossing only metallic spans  
Though paint and chalk  
Our interest did betray.  
The social game  
On face and ear we play.

On rubber weathered shoes I walked,  
Silent in the foul wisked  
Belch and bustle.  
Humanity on either side  
Watch cold,  
Defiant corner cells  
Of bombs and death.

The neon palaces of business land,  
Where sham and shallowness hold court  
Here the daily regulars circumvent  
News boys' cries of the violent.

Herb songs,  
The old wood of wrinkled souls,  
Transport the sights, smells  
The dried hangings  
To regions, yes, unreal.  
Fantasma' and yes  
The eternal pinpoint  
Of bombs hygienic death.

Activities of cheese cutting.  
Sitting and walking,  
All of them talking,  
Talking, talking, talking.  
Stop! for God sake, Stop.

We with thin faces  
Of shallow thoughts  
From shielded minds,  
Worry, wander, wonder  
Yes, we wonder  
Whose shining, maroon, pride  
Grips our blood red hearts,  
As we go blindly on?

Richard Schubert '62

The "avant-guardian" will contain  
student work: poems, short stories,  
lithos, etchings, cartoons, drawings,  
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